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SUBJECT: 2008 Country Reports on Terrorism

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11. (U) Here is the 2008 Country Report on Terrorism for Sri Lanka. The point of contact for this cable is Ben Barry. His e-mail address is BarryBG@state.gov.

12. (U) BEGIN TEXT:

More than 7,000 people were killed and many thousands more displaced in 2008 as the Sri Lankan government continued its offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. Effective January 16, the government formally abrogated the 2002 Cease-Fire Accord (CFA) with the LTTE, and the conflict intensified during the year. The government maintained control of the Eastern Province, and captured the strategic town of Pooneryn in November placing the entire northwestern coast under government control. The LTTE continued to control a significant, although shrinking, section of the north and carried out attacks throughout the country. The Sri Lankan Army remained deployed across the country in all areas it controlled to fight the insurgency. The Special Task Force (STF) police were deployed in the east, north and in strategic locations in the west.

In 2008 there were at least 70 attacks attributed to the LTTE including the October assassination by suicide bombing of the leader of the opposition in the North Central Provincial Council retired Major General Janaka Perera, UNP organizer Dr. Raja Johnpulle, and 26 others in Anuradhapura. In April, a suicide bomber killed 14 people in Gampaha district including Minister of Highways Jeyaraj Fernandopulle. Other major LTTE attacks included air strikes on the naval base in Trincomalee (August), a combined air-ground assault on a military base in Vavuniya (September) and the bombing of the Thallady Army camp in Mannar and Kelanitissa power plant in Colombo in October. The LTTE also targeted public transportation systems. In one instance a parcel bomb killed 26 civilians at a bus stand in Colombo (April). In 2007-8 attacks attributed to the LTTE killed more than 350 individuals and injured over 1300.

The government used paramilitary groups to assist its military forces in fighting the LTTE. The Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), led by breakaway-LTTE eastern commanders Vinayagamurthi Muralitharan alias "Karuna" and Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthen alias "Pillaiyan", operated mostly in the east. Karuna was appointed a Member of Parliament on October 7; Pillaiyan was elected as the Chief Minister of the Eastern Provincial Council. The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), led by government Minister of Social Services and Social Welfare Douglas Devananda, operated in Jaffna. During the year there were numerous killings of civilians by unknown actors suspected of association with the TMVP or the EPDP.

The government captured the key town of Pooneryn in November and hoped use the western A32 road and a pontoon bridge to open a land route to the Jaffna peninsula in 2009. At the end of the year government forces and the LTTE were engaged in heavy fighting on the outskirts of the LTTE's administrative capital Kilinochchi. The LTTE maintained control of a shrinking section of the north and retained the capacity to mount attacks throughout the country. The LTTE continued to finance itself with contributions from the Tamil Diaspora in North America, Europe, and Australia, by imposing local "taxes" on businesses operating in the areas of Sri Lanka under its control, and reportedly by extortion operations in government-controlled areas. The LTTE also used Tamil charitable organizations as fronts for its fundraising. In November 2007, the USG designated under Executive Order 13224 and froze the U.S.-held

assets of the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization, a charity associated with the LTTE. The LTTE previously used such funds for weapons purchases on the international black market and also captured arms from Sri Lankan security forces. To date the Sri Lankan Navy has sunk ten LTTE supply ships. The most recent sinking occurred in June 2008.

Human rights groups and other observers have accused all parties to the conflict with carrying out abductions and extrajudicial killings. The LTTE and the TMVP were charged with forced conscription and child recruitment. In general, the LTTE did not intentionally target U.S. citizens or assets, limiting attacks to Sri Lankan security forces, political figures, civilians, and businesses. However, attacks occurred within the vicinity of the U.S. embassy and personnel; in 2007 the U.S. Ambassador was traveling in a helicopter that came under mortar fire. The LTTE subsequently apologized for the incident.

The Sri Lankan government continues to be cooperative with U.S. law enforcement in support of ongoing prosecutions in the U.S. The U.S. has also provided training for relevant Sri Lankan government agencies and the banking sector. The Government of Sri Lanka cooperated with the United States to implement both the Container Security Initiative and the Megaports program at the port of Colombo.

END TEXT.

BLAKE